

THE KOLKATA INTELLECTUALS AND BENGALI MODERNITY

av

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ABSTRACT

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The aim with this thesis is to explore and enhance the understanding of methodological questions in anthropological analysis. I focus my main argument on topics taken up in antiorientalist and postcolonial approaches. Analysis is closely related to political issues and an analysis include a critical reflection and deconstruction. The discussion is elaborated through the Kolkata intellectuals and Bengali Modernity. The Kolkata intellectuals are vehicles of change, transmitters of ideas and they have had a key function in social, political, cultural and intellectual movements in Bengal during the last centuries. They have played an instrumental role in the construction of discourses and paradigms in Bengal, or Bengali Modernity, a concept introduced by the Subaltern Studies group to denote the new configurations that appeared in the colonial encounter. The Subaltern Studies group claimed that Bengali Modernity was a unique construction, not comparable to western modernity. Hence, the methods of analysis should reflect the Bengali reality and not western conceptions of modernity. The subaltern studies group, influenced by a postcolonial approach, used a post-modern method to analyse Bengali modernity. However, a post-modern approach leads to a series of negative consequences. My analysis of the Kolkata intellectuals and Bengali modernity extends on this discussion and suggests that a phenomenological method gives the correct device to analyse the Kolkata intellectuals and Bengali modernity, providing a better framework to handle issues such as relativism and the formation of the subject than the post-modern approach.

On a theoretical level, an examination of the Kolkata intellectuals and the processes and mechanisms included in the construction of Bengali modernity contributes to a greater understanding and knowledge of the dynamics involved in processes of change and development. On an empirical level, this study, based on extensive fieldwork and comprehensive archival research, gives a wider insight into intellectuals and intellectual groups in Kolkata. Studies of contemporary intellectual groups and contemporary aspects of society and life in Kolkata is a rather neglected area.

Keywords: Kolkata, West Bengal, Intellectuals, Elite groups, Intellectual discourse, Postcolonialism, Relativism, Subaltern Studies, Methodology, Anthropology, Social Change, Development, Media,